

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3803
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 12339

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, VM
SUBJECT: VISIT OF RETIRED AMBASSADOR RIDGWAY KNIGHT TO VIET-
NAM

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING ARE IMPRESSIONS CONVEYED TO EMBOFF BY
RETIRED U.S. AMBASSADOR RIDGWAY KNIGHT ON HIS VISIT TO
VIET-NAM, APRIL 20-27. HE HAS MADE EXTENSIVE NOTES ON HIS
MEETINGS AND OBSERVATIONS AND IS ARRANGING FOR SUBSTANTIVE
DEBRIEFING IN DEPARTMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. RETIRED AMBASSADOR RIDGWAY KNIGHT RETURNED TO BANGKOK
APRIL 27 AFTER SPENDING WEEK IN VIET-NAM ON PRIVATE BUSINESS
TRIP. HE DEPARTED BANGKOK APRIL 28 ENROUTE TO U.S. AND WILL
BE IN TOUCH WITH DEPT DIRECTLY REGARDING DETAILS OF HIS
TRIP, INCLUDING TWO CONVERSATIONS WITH SRV DEPUTY FOREIGN
MINISTER NGUYEN CO THACH. FOLLOWING ARE IMPRESSIONS OF VISIT
WHICH HE GAVE TO EMBOFF.

2. TRAVEL - KNIGHT TRAVELLED FROM BANGKOK TO SAIGON ON AIR
FRANCE APRIL 20. HE WAS GIVEN BRIEF, CAREFULLY CONDUCTED
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TOUR OF DOWNTOWN AREA OF SAIGON AND HOUSED IN CARAVELLE
HOTEL (NOW DOC LAP HOTEL). SAIGON AIRPORT WAS RELATIVELY
DESERTED, APART FROM SOME OLD C-47'S IN ONE CORNER. THERE
WAS NO SIGNIFICANT PROGRAM FOR HIM IN SAIGON, AND KNIGHT
HAD IMPRESSION HIS RETURN TRANSIT THROUGH SAIGON WAS DELAYED
SOMEWHAT TO ENSURE HE WOULD HAVE LITTLE TIME IN THAT CITY.
HIS GUIDES IGNORED HIS REQUEST TO VISIT CHOLON. TRAVEL

FROM SAIGON TO HANOI WAS ON IL-18 JET PROP TRANSPORT, NON-STOP. TRAVEL FROM HANOI TO SAIGON WAS ON YAK-40 PURE JET TRANSPORT WHICH, ODDLY ENOUGH, WAS ABOUT 20 MINUTES SLOWER IN MAKING TRIP THAN IL-18. HE HAD ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO EXIT VIET-NAM VIA VIENTIANE BUT COULD NOT MAKE NECESSARY CONNECTIONS TO ENSURE DEPARTURE FROM BANGKOK APRIL 28. HENCE, HE RETURNED VIA SAIGON TO BANGKOK.

3. SAIGON-HANOI COMPARISON - KNIGHT HAD NEVER VISITED EITHER SAIGON OR HANOI PRIOR TO THIS TRIP. HE WAS CONSCIOUS, HOWEVER, OF OBSERVING A STEADY DOWNWAR PROGRESSION AS HE WENT FROM BANGKOK TO SAIGON TO HANOI. ON THE WAY BACK FROM HANOI, SAIGON LOOKED VERY MUCH BETTER, AND BANGKOK EVEN MORE SO. SAIGON IS STILL A GRACIOUS CITY, WITH WOMEN BRIGHTLY DRESSED IN AO DAI'S. HANOI IS A GRIM, LUSTRELESS CITY, ALTHOUGH IT IS CLEAN. WHILE HIS TIME IN SAIGON WAS SHORT, KNIGHT NOTICED CONSIDERABLE AMOUNTS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT THERE, EVIDENTLY IN STORAGE, ESPECIALLY ARTILLERY AND TANKS. THERE WERE RELATIVELY FEW MOTOR BIKES IN EVIDENCE IN HANOI, WHEREAS THEY WERE STILL QUITE COMMON IN SAIGON. HE SAW NO AMERICAN VEHICLES IN HANOI BUT NUMEROUS SOVIET TRUCKS. HE TRAVELLED IN A VOLGA SEDAN WHEN MOVING AROUND THE HANOI AREA.

4. ACCOMMODATION - AMBASSADOR KNIGHT WAS A STATE GUEST DURING VISIT. AS NOTED ABOVE, IN SAIGON HE STAYED AT
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THE CARAVELLE HOTEL. IN HANOI HE WAS HOUSED AT THE STATE GUEST HOUSE, A RELATIVELY NEW BUILDING CONSTRUCTED WITH MARBLE SIDING (HE WAS THE ONLY GUEST IN EVIDENCE AND HAD MEALS THERE IN SOLITARY SPLENDOR.). HE WAS DRIVEN TO HAIPHONG, THENCE VIA ALONG BAY TO HON GAY, THE ANTHRACITE MINING CENTER. HE WAS HOUSED OVERNIGHT IN HON GAY IN A CLEAN, THOUGH MODEST GUEST HOUSE.

5. AREAS VISITED - AT HIS REQUEST, AMBASSADOR KNIGHT WAS TAKEN TO VISIT BAN BAI, NEAR PHU THO, SITE OF THE SWEDISH PAPER PLANT PROJECT. HE WAS BEING BRIEFED ON THE PROJECT AT THE SITE BY A VIETNAMESE TECHNICIAN WHEN THE SWEDISH PROJECT MANAGER ENTERED THE ROOM WITH SOME ANNOYANCE TO JOIN THE BRIEFING, HAVING JUST LEARNED OF THE VISIT. THE PAPER PLANT PROJECT, WHICH THE VIETNAMESE HAD ORIGINALLY REQUESTED FROM SWEDEN TO PROVIDE PAPER PRIMARILY FOR EDUCATIONAL TEXTBOOKS, IS FAR BEHIND SCHEDULE. IF THE PRESENT WORK FORCE OF SOME 400 SKILLED WORKERS CAN BE EXPANDED TO 1000 SKILLED WORKERS, THE FIRST PHASE OF THE PROJECT MIGHT BE COMPLETED BY ABOUT 1980. OTHERWISE, AT PRESENT RATES, IT WILL TAKE ANOTHER YEAR AND A HALF (I.E., TILL 1981). THE PROJECT, AS PRESENTLY ESTIMATED,

IS LIKELY TO COST IN EXCESS OF US \$120 MILLION, ALTHOUGH
THE SWEDISH AMBASSADOR INDICATED HE THOUGHT THE FINAL
FIGURE WOULD BE EVEN HIGHER.

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 12339

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6. AMBASSADOR KNIGHT ALSO VISITED HAIPHONG AND WAS ABLE
TO OBSERVE NUMEROUS CASES OF EQUIPMENT AND MERCHANDISE ON
THE DOCKS IN OBVIOUSLY WEATHERED PACKING, EVIDENTLY LONG
EXPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS. THERE IS EVIDENCE OF PREPARA-
TIONS TO EXTEND THE DOCKS. AMBASSADOR KNIGHT WAS TOLD
THAT DEMURRAGE (DELAYS ENCOUNTERED BY SHIPS IN OBTAINING
DOCK SPACE TO DISCHARGE CARGO) HAD BEEN REDUCED TO 10 DAYS.

7. DURING VISIT TO ANTHRACITE COAL MINES AT HON GAY
AMBASSADOR KNIGHT OBSERVED CARGO SHIPS LYING OFF THE PORT
BUT EVIDENTLY NOT LOADING COAL, AS THEY WERE VERY CLEAN.
(EMBASSY COMMENT: IT IS POSSIBLE THAT DURING THE PERIOD
WHEN CONGESTION AT HAIPHONG WAS AT ITS WORST SOME CARGO
WAS DIVERTED TO HON GAY FOR DISCHARGE AND TRUCKED TO HAI-
PHONG AND HANOI. END COMMENT.)

8. IMPRESSIONS OF HIS GUIDES - IN SAIGON AMBASSADOR KNIGHT
WAS ACCOMPANIED BY TWO VIETNAMESE WHO SAID THEY WERE
RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS SECURITY. THEY SEEMED TO BE POLICE
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TYPES RATHER THAN DIPLOMATS. IN HANOI AND NORTH VIET-NAM KNIGHT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY FOUR VIETNAMESE, THE MOST SENIOR OF WHOM WAS NAMED LE MAI (APPROXIMATE). KNIGHT UNDERSTOOD THAT LE MAI WAS IN PARIS FOR THE PEACE TALKS FROM 1969 TO 1973 AND SEEMED PERCEPTIVE AND SOPHISTICATED. ONE OF THE OTHERS SEEMED TO ASK QUESTIONS IN SHARPER MANNER THAN LE MAI. CONVERSATION WITH THOSE ACCOMPANYING HIME WAS GENERALLY IN ENGLISH, THOUGH CONVERSATION WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN CO THACH WAS IN FRENCH. HIS GUIDES IN NORTH VIET-NAM WERE NOT WITHOUT HUMOR. WHEN PROBLEMS DEVELOPED IN ARRANGING HIS RESERVATIONS TO LEAVE HANOI, AMBASSADOR KNIGHT ASKED WHAT THEY WOULD DO. THEY REPLIED AT ONCE THAT THEY WOULD START HIS PROGRAM OF VISITS ALL OVER.

9. SUBSTANTIVE MEETING WITH CIEF OF NORTH AMERICAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT WAS CORDIAL, AND NEITHER HE NOR ANY OTHER VIETNAMESE DURING TRIP MADE ANY REFERENCE TO HANOI'S LONG-STANDING DEMAND FOR AMERICAN AID TO "HEAL THE WOUNDS OF WAR." AMBASSADOR KNIGHT SAID THAT HE HAD MADE CLEAR TO ALL OF THE VIETNAMESE HE HAD CONTACT WITH THAT THEY WOULD GET NOWHERE BY MAKING SUCH DEMANDS.

10. EMBASSY COMMENT: AMBASSADOR KINGHT HAS MADE EXTENSIVE NOTES ON HIS TRIP AND HIS MEETINGS AND INDICATED HE WOULD DEVELOP THEM FURTHER ON HIS TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES. EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING REPORT ON HIS SUBSTANTIVE DEBRIEFING IN DEPT.

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